



# Working the Land: Spring 2021

A special supplement to the Marion Chronicle-Tribune, Huntington Herald-Press, Wabash Plain Dealer, Peru Tribune and Frankfort Times



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## Thank you, farmers

Farmers in Northern Indiana faced incredible adversity in 2020. Processing plants shut down. Dairy farmers were forced to dump their milk. Cattle, swine and poultry slaughtered in the spring couldn’t make it to the grocery market shelves. Statewide shutdowns confined people in their homes for weeks on end, dropping demand for gas to historic lows. Ethanol plants were forced to shutter. Indiana corn set in grain bins while commodity prices took a nosedive after the spring of 2020. They survived a trade war with China, taking the brunt of it all in stride to protect and further American interests. If anyone was up for the challenge this pandemic has brought, it was Hoosier farmers in the heartland. They’ve weathered flooding and dry spells of recent years. They’ve raised kids prepared to take on the challenges that lie ahead, knowing that farming – though it may change – will always be a noble and much-needed profession. Northern Indiana farmers have kept food on the shelves and on our tables throughout all of these challenges. They didn’t throw up their hands. They got them dirty instead. Facing declining profits, they didn’t take a day off. They never do. They rise before the sun comes up and stay out in their fields long after the sun has set. They used intuition and critical thinking to navigate the unprecedented times. It’s part of the trade. They don’t protest or gripe about the issues they face. They keep their heads down and keep working through thick and thin to do their best for their country. It’s something we should all strive to implement in our own lives: perseverance, fortitude and initiative. We owe a great thanks to all the farmers in Northern Indiana who worked day in and day out to keep our country going. They don’t get the recognition they deserve in the media, but Hoosiers know their worth. Next time you see a farmer in their field, wave and smile. Reciprocate to them the care and compassion they show us everyday. We couldn’t do what we do without the people who dedicate themselves to the profession of agriculture. They fuel our bodies and keep things going no matter the circumstances. Thank you Indiana farmers. Your work doesn’t go unnoticed.

## Huntington County farmer leans on family values to outlast pandemic

Warren farmer relies on resourcefulness, late father’s guidance to salvage crop  
By KYLA RUSSELL  
news@h-ponline.com

Farming is not an occupation, it is a lifestyle. This spirit lives on amid the COVID-19 pandemic for Ind. farmer, Brian Warpup. Warpup, a Ball State graduate, husband, and father of three, is a fourth-generation farmer at Warpup Farms in Warren, Ind. After graduating college, he went into the workforce, but in 2000 decided to head back to his farming roots and advance with the opportunities there. Warpup Farms tends to 3,400 acres of land, specializing in raising corn and soybeans. Successful farming is affected by many uncontrollable factors. Rainfall, soil health, temperature, and the economy are often accounted for. A pandemic was not one of these factors. In recent years, the weather has not been ideal for midwestern farmers. “Because of the weather and its effects, I could not wait to get to 2020,” Warpup said. His hope did not manifest in an expected way. In March of 2020, family farms experienced a shift in their yearly routine, as the coronavirus pandemic struck America. Warpup Farms was not left out. “Our commodity prices took a nosedive. I mean straight down,” Warpup said. Citizens were instructed to stay at home and refrain from any traveling. As a corn supplier for several ethanol plants



Brian Warpup inspects his corn crop at his Warren, Indiana farm. A fourth generation farmer, Warpup relied on lessons from his father to outlast the economic downtown and market volatility during the COVID-19 pandemic.



around the nation, this sudden change in gas usage was apparent to Warpup. He pivoted from his typical spring-time operation, finding other avenues to sell their crop. The farm sold their product to a turkey farm in Ohio, Cooper farms. Cooper farms received the product at a 30-35 percent discount. “That discount did hurt. As far

as monetarily, the pandemic did affect us. We have since kind of crawled out of that as the economy has come back,” Warpup said. Right now, the global economy sits in an ideal position for Warpup farms, especially in regards to American trading relations with China. “Right now, as a farmer, China is our best friend because they are buying so many soybeans, and buying corn,” Warpup said. “China never bought corn before the tariffs were lifted.” Presidential policies deeply affect most Americans, including family farmers. With a different diplomatic, and policy

# State of Indiana launches online market for farmers, consumers

Indiana Grown brings new avenue for farmers to market goods during global health crisis

By **MARKUS MILLER**  
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More and more people are turning to online shopping and selling during COVID-19, and that includes Indiana farmers, agricultural entrepreneurs and consumers.

Indiana Grown, a program administered by the Indiana State Department of Agriculture, has recently begun helping their members sell agricultural products online with the Shop Indiana Grown online marketplace.

Launched in Dec. 2020, the marketplace started with nearly 40 vendors. As of Mar. 1, the site lists 78 vendors that sell a variety of products ranging from coffee to duck meat.

The inspiration for the online marketplace not only came from COVID-19. The Indiana Grown Marketplace has also sold products during the Indiana State Fair in recent years.

Program Director Heather Tallman said that people would ask during the State Fair Marketplace, which started in 2016, if there was a place to buy the products online.

“That experience and that success with our store at the state fair kind of led to the shop Indiana Grown on the internet,” Indiana Lieutenant Governor Suzanne Crouch said. “And if Covid has taught us one thing, it’s that people are relying more and more on the internet.”

Crouch called the online store a “one-stop-shop” for the people of Indiana to purchase authentic, Indiana-made products.

The Indiana Grown program now boasts over 1700 members, which includes not only farmers but farmers markets, processors, wineries, breweries, artisans and more.

According to Tallman, membership, which is free, is open to those who package, raise, grow or process a product within the state



Getty image

of Indiana. Other businesses can become partners and show their dedication to supporting Indiana agriculture.

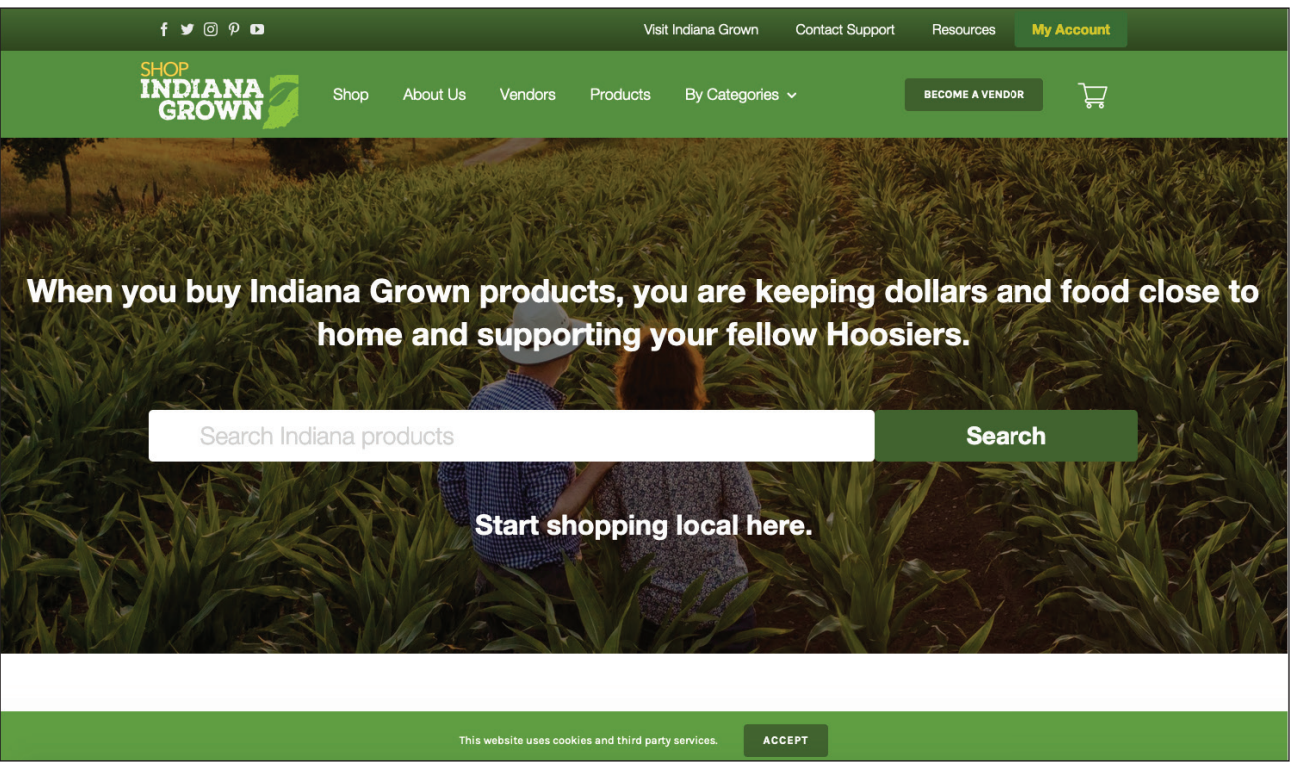
For new vendors hoping to sell their products through Indiana Grown, the program has partnered with the Indiana Small Business Development Center to provide resources for those hoping to start. Facilities that sell must be inspected by the county or state and follow Indiana State Department of Health guidelines.

“If someone is growing sweet corn in Indiana, we want them to be able to sell it and keep those dollars here,” Tallman said. “And we want people in Indiana to be able to enjoy it. There are a lot of people that love their southern Indiana watermelon and cantaloupe. There are a lot of people that like to go pick berries in the spring and summer. Everyone has their culinary traditions through agriculture, and supporting local food has never been more important than now.”

Even during the pandemic, Indiana Grown has seen growth and regularly adds members. According to Tallman, they approved seven new members in the week leading up to Feb. 25

In regards to the online market, they are trying to make things as accessible as possible to producers so they can continue to support them.

“We’ve spent this time listening to what our members need, and helping them make valuable connections within agriculture,” Tallman said. “We’ve tried to be a networking funnel to make important, valuable links and to make sure we’re looking ahead and staying nimble as we



shopindianagrown.org

move forward.”

The Indiana State Department of Agriculture has focused on their “Rural Road to Recovery” lately, which has been led by Crouch. A major priority is to “assess and mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 on Indiana’s agriculture and food system.”

Indiana Grown is hoping to not only aid agriculture during the pandemic with their online marketplace but also establish important connections and resources to Indiana agriculture to keep products in state and Indiana agriculture healthy and vital.

“(Indiana Grown) promotes, supports and markets Indiana agriculture products,” Crouch said. “It’s opened up a whole new market for small entrepreneurial farmers, whether it be an organic farmer, an urban farmer or a large farmer who has many products. It’s increased their sales and productivity.”

The online marketplace can be accessed at [shopindianagrown.org](http://shopindianagrown.org).



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# ‘We’re just hanging in there right now’

Family-run Grant County dairy farm remains optimistic despite ongoing challenges

By PAYNE MOSES  
news@chronicle-tribune.com

Meet Robert “Bob” Jackson.

At the age of 82, Jackson has run Jackson’s Dairy since he graduated high school in 1956.

Jackson’s Dairy has always been a small family-owned business.

Jackson’s father, Bob and Bob’s brother began in 1956 and the employees since then have not expanded out too far past the family tree.

Even with the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic, Jackson spoke to how little his personnel has changed on his farm.

“We’ve had really good health, and we haven’t had to change on employees too much,” Jackson said. “We don’t have a large dairy like most places do. This is just what we could do.”

Jackson’s Dairy currently employs 14, including Bob’s wife, daughter, two sons and two grandsons.

There are approximately 750 cows on the farm, with an estimated 450 being milked and 80 to 90 calves as well, according to Jackson.

Jackson referred to the past two years as being far more profitable, but the onslaught of the pandemic has forced the dairy market downwards.

“Three or four years ago, it was about \$25 for 100 [gallons of milk] and then it went as low as – I think a month ago, it was \$17,” Jackson said.

The surrounding markets of feed and other dairy farm necessities, however, are trending in the opposite direction.

Many local schools not being held in-person has also contributed to this undesirable market climate, with cafeterias not being a part of the dairy’s main outlet anymore.

Jackson affirmed the dairy market usually fluctuates, but the past year or so has magnified it.

“The bad thing is that all your feed inputs like soybean meal has gone up a little [in price],” Jackson said. “Price goes up, but the milk price don’t jump up. It’s just not a real fun thing right now.”

Especially at the start of the worldwide Covid-19 pandemic,

Jackson was told by government officials the virus could affect his cows. This prediction, according to Jackson, turned out to be false.

The milk product still remains the primary object of importance during the pandemic, except it is now handled more carefully



than ever.

Quality control, then, has certainly increased.

On the other hand, taking sufficient care of his cows has long been a part of Jackson’s agenda before the pasteurization process.

“We have a nutritionist that’s worked with us since 1974,” Jackson said. “They make sure we have everything right in the feed. This fellow has just been excellent at it. That’s what he does... He’s just been a really good friend.”

Jackson said his farm uses a distributor that markets their milk, noting how that process has functioned since their first business dealings.

“We’ve got Great Lakes Milk [Products Inc.] handling our milk,” Jackson said. “They just try to find the best market they can for us. A lot of times it doesn’t last very long, and they have to switch us to another market.”

No one working at Jackson’s Dairy has been infected by the coronavirus, but Jackson points out how the farm atmosphere has had to adapt.

“We haven’t had anybody here have it [Covid-19],” Jackson said. “Thank God for that. And at my age, 82, you don’t want it... With everything we’ve done, we’ve had to adjust around.”

The 65 years of Jackson’s Dairy started simply,



“The bad thing is that all your feed inputs like soybean meal has gone up a little [in price]. Price goes up, but the milk price don’t jump up. It’s just not a real fun thing right now.”

ROBERT “BOB” JACKSON

with Bob selling milk in “10-gallon cans” as he recalled from the early days.

A combination of the Covid-19 pandemic and ample milk producer competition has left Jackson’s Dairy in its current position today.

Jackson never revealed pessimism regarding his dairy’s state, but humbly summarized what many American farmers are feel-

ing.

“We’re just hanging in there right now,” Jackson said.

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Photo provided  
Many farmers in Northern Indiana lease their land to energy companies that utilize wind turbines to produce power, bringing extra payments to the farm.

# Issues and insights: Turning the meters back

Navigating small scale wind and solar energy installations to help power operations

By **ROB BURGESS**  
Wabash Plain Dealer Editor

Farmers across the state have experienced success installing renewable energy on their farms and turning their electricity meters in the opposite direction.

When it comes to making a solar or wind power installation work for a local agricultural business, there's one element Wabash County Purdue University extension educator Geoff Schortgen considers essential: customization.

"The farms that I've seen with the most success are the ones that are catering with their operations. The more preplanning and the more forethought that's given to a solar panel project, they can cater to the specific operation," said Schortgen. "The better you can plan it for your operation, the more success you'll have."

**Net metering**

Net metering allows you to earn a credit on your electric

bill for the excess energy you produce from your system, according to the nonprofit Solar United Neighbors.

"If their panels are making more electricity than they're using, they're putting it back in the grid, and they can kind of pocket that," said Schortgen.

In 2017, Indiana passed a law, Senate Enrolled Act 309, that will eventually phase out net metering. Currently, all Indiana customers of investor-owned utilities are eligible for net metering. If you installed before December 31, 2017, you will receive the full retail credit for your excess electricity production until 2047. If you installed after January 1, 2018, or will install before July 1, 2022, you will receive the full retail credit for your excess electricity production until 2032.

Schortgen grew up on a small family farm in Allen County. He said he had spoken with a farmer who lived near his parent's house in Fort Wayne who had a quar-

ter-acre of solar powers for their home electricity and grain dryers.

"If the sun is shining, it's producing more energy than they need. They've got it set up with their specific energy companies that turns back the meter," said Schortgen. "He only has one electric bill a year and that's usually in November. That's when he's really drying things after the harvest, but he had to do about a year of preplanning where it would cover what he needed. It wasn't one of those things drop solar panels in a field and good to go. There was a ton of pre-planning."

In December 2019, Midwest Poultry Services receiving a \$155,304 United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) grant to install a Solar Array System at their North Manchester facility.

Vice president of operations Dan Krouse said the grant covered a portion of the cost of the 1.1 mega-watt, 3,456-panel system. Krouse said the system has an approximately nine-year

See **METERS**, page E5

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Photo provided  
Northern Indiana farmers are using solar arrays, like the one pictured here, to power their grain bins, farmhouses and operations. Certain programs allow farmers to sell unused energy, produced by solar panels on their property, back to the grid.

METERS

From page E4

payback and covers about a sixth of the total power usage on that farm.

“Net metering is really important for solar installations because it effectively allows the power company to serve as a free battery,” said Krouse. “We have excess power that we generate, which solar systems usually do because you get so much more at the peak of the day right around noon that you have to send some out to the grid. And with net metering when you send your power to the grid you get paid exactly what you’re buying power for.”

Placement concerns

Schortgen is also now a non-voting representative on the Wabash County Planning Commission board.

Planning Commission director Mike Howard said individuals or businesses which seek to use wind and solar power “on their properties, certainly wouldn’t be an issue.”

Howard said large-scale operations were another matter, however.

“We’re not in favor as a board of an industrial wind farm, per se, in the county,” said Howard. “I don’t want to ever say it couldn’t be in Wabash County, but it

would be really difficult ... just because we don’t think that’s what we want.”

Howard said they were interested in keeping farmland usable for the same purpose for years to come.

“On a solar unit you’re wanting a pretty wide, pretty big flat area and a lot of times and a lot of times that’s in high-productive farm ground,” said Howard. “We want to keep that as cropland.”

Schortgen said they would have to be very thorough if a large-scale operation was to be proposed.

“The biggest resource in Wabash County is the farmland, so we’re pretty protective of that,” said Schortgen. “We’re looking for that longevity and conservation so it’s not just something that looks good but will be good for the long, long term future. (We’re) trying to take it with a grain of salt and make sure we kind of cover all our bases. It’s one of those things where change is always interesting, but we want to make sure we cover everything.”

Life cycle issues

With the average life cycle of a wind turbine somewhere between 20 and 25 years, and between 25 and 30 years for solar arrays, the question of who maintains and replaces the equipment remains.

“If the unit becomes obsolete and things like that, (it would be) getting it torn down and getting it put back,” said Howard. “We can write anything we want in an ordinance but to 20 years down the road find the person to do that is pretty hard to do.”

Schortgen said so far the renewable energy installations they had seen had been successful, but those were smaller-scale.

“They’re putting it on the corner of the homestead, not necessarily in a field. They’re getting power or close to what they needed for their needs,” said Schortgen. “What we’re seeing is not necessarily the large-scale solar or renewable (energy), but something where it’s more of a supplement. Because they’re all still hooked up to the traditional grid.”

Schortgen said those interested in renewable energy installations should “be careful not to view it like a silver bullet, more of like a tool in the box.”


Oh, and be prepared to spend more than you expect to up front.

“Whatever you think that number is double it because there are always things that need to come into consideration,” said Schortgen.


Rob Burgess, Wabash Plain Dealer editor, may be reached by email at rburgess@wabashplaindealer.com.

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Miami County students get hands on experience raising cattle, farming land and learning ins and outs of the business

Things are growing at Maconaquah School Corporation's agricultural program, including the program itself.

"The school purchased 47 acres here this fall," Maconaquah Middle School Principal Craig Jernagan said.

Jernagan helps facilitate the program and said that the addition of new land means there are more changes in store.

“We are really trying to make this a K through 12 approach,” he said.

Currently, the program has a high school and middle school component, including an eighth-grade “Intro to Ag” class.

It's already seen plenty of success and positive attention.

About five years ago, Jernagan said, students started raising cattle that are now sold back to the school corporation's cafeterias.

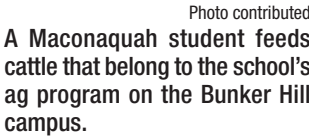
That program is now self-supporting, with the cattle all birthed and raised by the students and teacher-coordinators.

That work though also allows for teaching outside of just the ag program.

"The cattle we raise, we use some of that data we gain in science classes as well," Jernagan said.

The success has also helped find funding that has facilitated the new growth, with Jernagan estimating that the school has been able to secure about \$200,000 in grants in recent years to grow the programs.

In 2019, they landed a \$100,000 U.S. Department of Agriculture grant – one of 126 in the country – to purchase



more beef breeding stock and equipment.



Cattle that belong to the Maconaquah schools ag program stand in a pasture near a playground on the the school campus in Bunker Hill.



A Maconaquah student works with animals from the school's ag program.



A Maconaquah student sets out some hay for the cattle belonging to the school's ag program at the Bunker Hill campus.

more beef breeding stock and equipment.

"I am looking forward to applying this grant to our program," middle school ag

teacher John Sinnamon said in a news release announcing the grant. "This grant will greatly benefit our school, our Ag program, and most importantly our students. The big picture is that we have the backing of the USDA for our schools ag program."

They've received other help from farmers in the area.

"Just local families have been pretty good to us," he said. "To the point we have bought ground."

There is still work to be done, and students are doing much of that on the new land now.

“The kids have been working on building fence and

clearing brush to get ready for row crops," he said.

About half of the 47 acres will be dedicated to those crops, and then other land will be set aside for pasturing the cattle.

With it all up and running, the high school will add two “pathways” to its portion of the program, one in animal science and one in plant science.

Similar to the way the program has worked with the cattle, the row crops will likely add teaching opportunities for other science classes, Jernagan predicted.

The ultimate goal will be to make both the animal and plant programs fully self-supporting.

"The profit that would come off the row crops would go right back into the program," he said.

“We are also looking at onboarding the elementary students as well,” Jernagan said, explaining that a bee keeping program is in the works that can be used in the curriculum for the younger students.

All of it, Superintendent Jamie Callane said, has been aimed at bringing the ag offerings at the corporation up to date and is part of an effort in the high school to boost career and technical education, or CTE, offerings.

That started with welding and construction trades classes and has expanded to the ag work.

The recent land purchase will also lead to a nature center for students in all buildings, according to Callane.

“We are very excited,” he said.

Jernagan said he estimates that about a third of seventh and eighth graders at the middle school enroll in the offerings.

Through the classes they learn not only about the work, signing up to feed the animals on the weekend and in bad weather, but they get to gain perspective on where the community's, and the nation's, food actually comes from.

“They are also learning about what that food supply chain looks like,” he said.

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# Carbon Credits designed to incentivize sustainability practices

**By KARA KAVENSKY**

The global effort to leverage agriculture as a meaningful climate solution is already impacting Clinton County.

A government program designed to incentivize reduction of greenhouse gases uses the implementation of carbon credits. This is one method to promote more sustainable practices in agriculture, and it's catching on.

The United States is ranked second only to China for being responsible for the most carbon emissions on our planet and one third of the U.S. greenhouse gas emissions comes from agriculture, according to the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR).

A carbon credit is a permit used to incentivize the lowering of emissions. A single carbon credit is equal to one ton of carbon dioxide. According to the Environmental Defense Fund, that is the equivalent of a 2,400-mile drive in terms of carbon dioxide emissions. A reduction in the number of credits happens over time, thus incentivizing companies to find innovative ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Another component of the carbon credit program is that participating companies are allotted a set number of credits, which decreases over time. They can sell any excess to another company, which is referred to as "cap and trade".

According to Investopedia, cap-and-trade programs remain controversial in the U.S. Eleven states have adopted this market-based approach to the reduction of greenhouse gases, according to the Center for Climate and Energy Solu-



tions. Ten of these states are located in the Northeast and have aligned their collective efforts to attack the problem through a program known as the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI). California has its own program, which claims to be the fourth largest in the world behind the European Union, South Korea, and the Chinese province of Guangdong. It should be noted that the California program applies also to its electric power plants, industrial plants, and fuel distributors.

"The commercial carbon market is up and coming. And with legislation introduced by the new administration, I believe we will see more opportunities for farmers to

benefit from these credits," says Adam Shanks, Ag & Natural Resource Educator for Clinton County, who is working on his master's degree at Purdue. "Being more conservation-minded is more than a trend. We are now better with cover crops, reduce and no-till, and this reduces greenhouse gases. It's not a new concept, but it is timely for this to be a best practice. And, to coin a pun, it's finally taking root."

Indigo Carbon, a technology company focused on improving grower profitability, environmental sustainability, and consumer health through the use of natural microbiology and digital technologies, presented the first agricul-



Carbon credits can be created by utilizing practices like planting cover crops.



Photos provided

tural carbon credit project to "deploy scalable, registry-approved methodologies for monitoring and quantifying net on-farm greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reductions and removals". Large companies such as Maple Leaf Foods, Epiphany Craft Malt are purchasing verified agricultural carbon credits to further their sustainability objectives. The NorthFace

provides their Indigo-partner farmers with a premium for cotton grown with regenerative practices and is incentivizing new (additional) practice adoption. The main push for carbon credits may come from the private sector, as consumers are focused on brand associate with corporate social responsibility.

When you add in the impetus of our new administra-

tion, which is more conservation-minded, we are likely to experience further efforts to combat the damage to our planet.

States across the country are exploring proposed legislation to establish their own plans.

The focus of efforts to curb carbon emissions into the atmosphere is an intimately local issue, impacting all of us.

## WARPUP

From page E1

approach, the new Biden administration may pose a different way of functioning for Warpup.

"If there is any international turmoil with the United States somewhere, it always affects us, always,"

Warpup said.

Along with rearranging the tangible process of farming, Warpup's virtual involvement greatly increased. In typical years, he attends meetings several times a year across the United States.

Now, these integral meetings take place on a digital platform.

Life for the Warpup family altered as well. Brian's wife, Nicole, is a kindergarten school teacher.

She transitioned to distance learning in March, while all three of their kids were home.

Warpup is cautiously hopeful, though. As a farmer, he has learned to be wise in successful, and troubled

years.

"In the good years, you do not spend all of your money. You save it, there will be bad years," Warpup said.

Warpup had good examples of this wise way of operating, including his grandfather, Harmon Warpup, who loved his life as a farmer.

He died at the age of 94

in April 2019. He nearly farmed until the day he passed.

"My grandfather loved being able to put a crop out, and have his hand in raising something," Warpup said. "It was a real privilege."

With an example like this, Warpup knows how to properly manage life as a farmer, and a profitable

business.

Looking toward the new year, Warpup is eager to have a successful planting window in April and May.

"If I don't have a good start to my planting year, it's difficult to have a good end to my harvest," Warpup said.

2021 holds great hope for the Warpup family.

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